



# AFRICA SECURITY BRIEF

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## Democracy and the Chain of Command: A New Governance of Africa's Security Sector

BY DOMINIQUE DJINDJÉRÉ

- ◆ Africa's senior defense and security officials must adopt higher standards of leadership to reshape Africa's security forces into professional bodies capable of handling contemporary security threats and earning the respect of civilian populations.
- ◆ Politicians' adherence to constitutional limits on power will avoid placing military officers in the untenable position of choosing between respecting civilian authority and upholding democracy.
- ◆ Security cooperation and assistance from international partners should favor African states with a track record of responsible governance within the security sector.

### HIGHLIGHTS

Serious political crises in Niger, Honduras, Turkey, Bangladesh, Guinea, Madagascar, Thailand, and Mauritania in recent years illustrate the continuing influence of security forces on the political trajectories of countries around the world. Examples of such instability are particularly recurrent in Africa. When Africa's political crises turn into coups, armed insurrections, or tragic confrontations, the defense and security forces (DSF) are invariably key players. For many years, such military actions were justified as an established right of state sovereignty over domestic issues. Often, they were even recognized as such on the international level.

This chaotic state of affairs is no longer acceptable. Much of Africa is now firmly committed to furthering the standards of democracy and human rights

that have advanced over the past two decades. Nonetheless, the path toward democracy, stability, and development is long and has many blind alleys. If Africa is to stay on this path, its defense and security forces must resolutely fulfill the role assigned to them by the nations they serve with dedicated and consistent adherence to constitutional rule and a republican ethos.

How can the defense and security forces be refashioned to support democracy? Ultimately, this is dependent on deep respect for the rule of law by all stakeholders, whether civilian or military, governmental or nongovernmental. The caliber of command and leadership exercised by a country's senior officers, accordingly, will determine the DSF ability to effectively support democratic governance. To this end, defense

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and security sector leaders should focus on five priority reforms to forge a *new military governance* in Africa.

### REFORM NO. 1: ESTABLISH NATIONAL, THREATS-BASED DSF

Some African defense and security forces continue to operate without any constituent document that clearly sets forth their missions and defines their rules of deployment. This perpetuates many problems and causes great confusion in defining their purposes, their configurations, and the resources and the tasks assigned to them.

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In the field, this often results in forces that are insufficiently organized and poorly equipped with lopsided troop numbers that are difficult to manage and control. Roles and responsibilities of the military and police in some instances are unclear and overlap, leading to inadequate budgetary support and improper and counterproductive deployments.

To remedy these structural and organizational weaknesses, it is incumbent on the senior chain of command to:

- ◆ define a clear and pertinent interservices national security strategy
- ◆ establish suitable doctrines for the use of force
- ◆ adopt rational organizational structures
- ◆ establish and maintain appropriate human and materiel resource management practices.

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Well-conceived national security plans are signs of military professionalism and enable proactive, flexible, and rapid responses to threats. Ghana, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Burkina Faso, among others, have made noteworthy progress toward developing such comprehensive plans.

A coherent national security strategy provides a systematic basis to restructure a nation’s defense and security forces. This is a top priority given that force structures for many African countries are misaligned with today’s threats. A rational defense structure provides commanders and oversight authorities the ability to better balance the missions to be fulfilled with available resources. It also fosters a more outcomes-based means to create budgets, recruit, train, procure assets, maintain equipment, and reliably track troop compensation. As a result, even in a context of limited budget resources, overall efficiency and readiness can improve. Additionally, these tools help prevent embezzlement and corruption, a frequent affliction within African DSF. For example, public submission of the defense budget to parliament was reinstituted in Zambia in the 1990s and has continuously led to adjustments that produce new efficiencies, reveal poor management, and rectify the misallocation of funds within the DSF.

Restructuring defense and security forces must involve key societal stakeholders. This approach underscores that DSF are from and for the broader society—not distinct from it. Sierra Leone, which continues to consolidate reforms made during a multiyear comprehensive DSF restructuring, provides a model of productive consultative defense review. Citizens’ groups, civilian agencies, and senior officers collaborated to design new policies that streamlined the DSF command structure, elevated training and personnel priorities, and enhanced accountability and transparency.

### REFORM NO. 2: BUILD INSTITUTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL DSF

Order, discipline, know-how, and rigorous standards have always been the mainstays of effective defense and security forces. Scenes of mutiny, looting, and violence by troops in ragged fatigues—all too familiar in Africa—are the antithesis of a professional DSF. Reforms that enhance ethics, improve training,

and provide adequate means to support the well-being of troops will institute and sustain professionalism.

The foundation of a professional defense and security force is reflected by basic ethical values typically formalized in an official code of conduct meant to guide the thoughts and actions of troops. Such values include loyalty to the nation and to the armed forces, a sense of duty, selfless service, and integrity. While some security forces in Africa wholly lack codes of ethics, others in countries such as Mali, Senegal, Ghana, Zambia, Tanzania, and Malawi have made great strides to inculcate these norms into their day-to-day operations. A code of conduct, however, is only valuable in so far as it is known and respected. As successful efforts in Mali have shown, such codes must be instilled in new recruits as well as seasoned officers and modeled by commanders if they are to be absorbed.

Ethical values must also be reinforced by a senior command that scrupulously rewards troops on merit and performance and strictly prohibits favoritism and arbitrary decisionmaking. Moreover, leadership by example, absent all demagoguery, is a fundamental quality of a disciplined and ethical DSF. Senior officers must know how to listen and advocate for their troops, exercise authority fairly, and emphasize professional development. Furthermore, the willingness to embrace ideas from the outside cultivates innovation and improvement across the chain of command.

Professionalism within the DSF is sustained through ongoing high-level training. This must be the underlying principle governing any organization that seeks to operate effectively. Professional skills are acquired through objective selection of participants, meaningful instruction delivered by experienced officers, and by the proper use of human and financial resources. Many African states, however, lack the staff colleges and other facilities that foster technical specialization and advanced strategic comprehension. To this end, properly targeted and dynamic military cooperation must be developed not only between developed and developing countries, but also among the latter.

Given the general security environment in Africa, training programs that focus on peace operations,

responsible crowd and riot control, rules of engagement, soldiers' compliance with the rule of law, and information and communication technologies are critical priorities. Such training enhances DSF capabilities and integrates democratic norms. Programs must also moderate officers' and soldiers' perceptions of "enemies" to more humane notions of "adverse parties," particularly during the low-intensity operations common in peacekeeping and those infrequent domestic police operations that require DSF support. Troops who assess threats dispassionately and rationally will operate more effectively.

Special attention must be paid to the social aspects of the military. A social services network is needed to ensure a dignified reentry into society, retirement, and management of family affairs. Similarly, every effort must be made to establish insurance policies to support families in the event of a serious injury or death of a member of the DSF. The aim is to meet basic material needs, thus facilitating composure, readiness to serve, and decreased susceptibility to corruption and the risk of manipulation.

During the 1980s, the Senegalese armed forces established a health-care system funded by military personnel on a monthly basis. Accountable management led to the addition of a social welfare provision, loans for property acquisition, and other services. In 2007, the armed forces of Burkina Faso established a similar system through a modest government subsidy coupled with monthly private contributions. The system has worked to the great satisfaction of personnel—boosting morale and pride.

### **REFORM NO. 3: INSPIRE RESPECT FOR REPUBLICAN VALUES**

Endowed by the constitution with the capacity to employ force, defense and security forces must transcend partisanship and represent the ideals of national unity and patriotism. In short, they must reflect an exemplary republican spirit. In a democratic form of government, this means respecting citizen rights and freedoms during periods of elections, strikes, protests, and other forms of democratic expression. Unfortunately, the demonstration of republican values among defense and security forces in Africa remains rare.

To achieve that spirit, the actions of the senior DSF command should focus in particular on three main goals.

First, adhere to a legal framework grounded in the primacy of the nation's democratically elected political authority over the defense and security forces. This basic requirement must be reinforced by the nonpoliticization of the armed forces and by their neutrality as an institution. Among Africa's armed forces, only those of Tanzania, Botswana, Malawi, Senegal, Mauritius, and a handful of others have never orchestrated or involved themselves in military coups. If Africa's emerging democratic militaries wish to be widely respected as professional, this must become the norm.

Second, ensure that the nation's defense and security forces are a genuinely national force and a melting pot containing all of the country's ethnic and social components. Such an approach will help build a sense of national identity, generate a deep-rooted pride in the armed forces, and inspire an attitude of sacrifice and readiness to defend the interests of the nation. Recruitment in Burkina Faso is nationwide and nondiscriminatory. Selection is based on a rule of proportionality. Recruitment targets are determined by the size of the population living in a given area relative to the total number to be recruited at the national level. As a result, the DSF better reflects the nation's diversity.

Third, the conduct of security forces must be exemplary at all times, in all venues, under all circumstances, and solidly grounded in international humanitarian law. Violence, racketeering, and other types of harassment of the local populace must be eliminated if security forces are to earn the trust and respect of citizens. To foster such conduct, the senior chain of command must empower and fully staff Offices of Inspectors General within the DSF to deter, investigate, and punish abuses. Similarly, senior officers must work closely with parliamentary committees responsible for oversight as well as auditors and judicial authorities.

#### **REFORM NO. 4: IMPROVE CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS**

Despite efforts from both sides, relations between civil and military officials in Africa continue to be typified by mutual distrust, deep prejudicial feel-

ings, and taboos based primarily on ignorance and lack of communication. Indeed, there are relatively few domestic venues where civilian and military officials regularly convene. When African civilians and members of the military meet at international events, a wide gulf in perceptions is often apparent despite their complementary skills.

Forums where civilians and the military can freely and confidentially meet and explore common interests and establish a culture of dialogue are needed. Such forums not only provide opportunities to establish relationships but also offer space to discuss integrated approaches to national security and develop shared understandings of roles and responsibilities. In times of crisis, the relationships built through such forums contribute invaluable to finding consensus-based and durable solutions.

Experiments in bringing senior-level civilians and military officers together for strategic planning sessions in Nigeria, South Africa, and Egypt have been constructive. Additionally, the well-respected Southern Africa Defence and Security Management Network has proven an exceptional initiative for promoting transparency, fostering confidence and cooperation between civilian and military officials, and contributing to shifts in policy and thinking. Originally developed in South Africa, the network of 10 universities and research institutes across the Southern African Development Community subregion is an independent nongovernmental body funded in part by international donors. It provides police, military, and civilian security professionals with joint specialized and accredited training, as well as support to governments in defense policy analysis and formulation. Similar initiatives should be adopted by other African countries and subregions. As an initial step, the creation of professional exchange programs between senior officers and civilian counterparts would build trust and ensure that the actions undertaken on each side are coordinated, complementary, and mutually understood.

The culture of secrecy that pervades many of Africa's armed forces (for example, some do not even publicize their national security plans) is another obstacle to constructive civil-military relations. An appropriate communications strategy that provides the public and media an understanding of life in the barracks is

essential—as a matter of principle and practical benefit. A public that knows and understands a DSF and its purpose will more freely support it. Such a DSF, in turn, will benefit from timely information-sharing, thereby enabling it to more effectively fulfill its protection mission. Due to the dramatic expansion of communication technologies in Africa, the rapid transmission of rumor and suspicions can quickly escalate into crises and complicate DSF missions, as it did in Kenya’s 2007 postelection violence, the 2010 food riots in Mozambique, and recurring communal conflict in Nigeria. A proactive strategy to share information—often by leveraging such technology—can combat confusion and rumor and prevent or stabilize conflict.

#### **REFORM NO. 5: MITIGATE THE COMPLEXITY OF NONMILITARY FACTORS**

Any progress toward improved governance within the DSF will also depend on complex issues involving factors beyond the security sector.

As a popular saying puts it so well, “the fish rots from the head down.” If the armed forces are subsidiary to civilian political authority, then adherence to republican values within the defense and security forces will depend to a great extent on the quality of civilian political leaders. Unfortunately, sectarianism and individual self-interest have frequently taken precedence over the interests of the nation. In order to hang on to power or to seize victory in fraudulent or lost elections, some African leaders are even prepared to violate the constitution and to imperil the country.

Such machinations often involve attempts to manipulate or command military and paramilitary units. Moves designed to foment discontent or even uprisings are typically started by spreading rumors and false information, sometimes cleverly filtered by vested elements within the media. On occasion, some well-off, power-hungry politicians will even deploy private militia in pursuit of their ambitions. Such irregular forces and armed gangs have played a predominant role in recent or current conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Burundi, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Liberia, Uganda, and Somalia. Elsewhere, weak institutional checks and balances leave DSF vulnerable to politicization. For instance, the role of the legislature in approving deployments, nominations, and other deci-

sions taken by the civilian commander in chief is often unclear even in Africa’s most stable states.

The recurrent and crucial role of private security providers also requires attention. Mercenaries motivated by money are, at times, entrusted with critical defense and security responsibilities. This tends to privatize and trivialize the defense and security of the nation. Compounding matters is the persistent intervention by certain major powers that, on occasion, exacerbate internal conflicts for strategic, economic, or other motives.

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Models of good governance that can counteract these complex nonmilitary factors are available, however. In particular, the United Nations, African Union, and Africa’s increasingly vital Regional Economic Communities have established legal instruments for strengthening democracy, peace, and good governance. For example:

- ◆ The African Union’s African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance
- ◆ The New Partnership for Africa’s Development’s African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), adopted by the African Union
- ◆ The Economic Community of West African States’ Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.

Rather than allow commitments to democratic standards, basic human rights, and good governance to remain optional considerations, these and similar agreements seek to make their observance obligatory. Disregard of such principles has contributed to weak state legitimacy, institutional sclerosis, and other shortcomings that frequently cause and drive crises in Africa. In other words, adherence to democratic processes—and the legitimacy this engenders—has a direct impact on peace and conflict, and therefore on the DSF.

When signatories violate the Charter or Protocol, regional bodies and their members are obligated to take

firm and consistent steps to halt and reverse further extra-constitutionalism and destabilization. With particular relevance to the senior command, such actions by regional bodies help strengthen the buffer that separates politics and defense and security. Civilian leaders who respect these charters earn the trust not only of the people but also of military officers and their staffs. When that buffer is breached, senior officers confront a troubling dilemma: respect the principle of civilian authority or uphold the standards of democracy. As a result, the state and entire chain of command is left compromised and the trajectory of the nation uncertain.

The African Peer Review Mechanism merits special mention regarding reforming Africa's DSF. Through the APRM, African states evaluate their efforts to advance democratic governance, including whether states have effective policies, institutions, and processes in place to prevent and manage intra- and interstate conflict. To enhance accountability and share best practices, this self-assessment is complemented by a separate evaluation conducted by a multinational team of African experts. All 12 of the completed APRM assessments have identified specific vulnerabilities to conflict and recommended how the DSF can improve diversity, human rights training, due process, and other inefficiencies. In other words, the APRM provides the senior chain of command a constructive process to measure performance, identify areas for improvement, and receive recommendations and innovations from African counterparts. The DSF should vigorously cooperate with and contribute to the APRM process.

Complementing the aims of these African instruments, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (an

agency of the U.S. Government) is an initiative that rewards good governance with greater development investment. This initiative merits replication within the security cooperation realm in Africa. Security cooperation and assistance that favors partners with a track record of principled and effective performance can incentivize responsible governance within the DSF while discouraging the exploitation of defense and security forces for political ends and personal interest.

## CONCLUSION

The degree to which democracy is consolidated in Africa is contingent on defense and security forces that are well structured, professional, based on republican values, and subordinate to civilian political authority. Across the continent, then, all societal and governmental leaders, including top military officials, must acknowledge the need to reverse outdated mindsets that stymie necessary reforms and adjustments. Additionally, international partners must work to consistently encourage good governance and unequivocally denounce the interference of defense and security forces in politics, politicians who seek to skirt constitutional checks and balances, and the use of armed militias and mercenaries as an instrument of contestation and conquest. Sustained support to committed reformers as they seek to implement sound, consensus-based plans is equally critical.

With professional defense and security forces fully dedicated to these reforms, Africa will be able to sustain the momentum now under way and steadily expand the number of countries on the continent respectful of democracy and human rights.

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